



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Thursday, March 29th, 2012

10:00 AM in Room 1E of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis and advocacy. I am here today to speak in support of S.B. No. 455 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

I am commenting specifically in support of *Section 7. 4a-60* of the bill. The struggle to provide equal opportunity to minority contractors in state contracting has been with us for many years. There couldn't be a better time to address this issue, considering the economic uncertainty many small businesses face today. There is enough evidence to demonstrate the importance of small businesses in stimulating economic growth. The most recent data we have available indicates that at some point prior to 2008 black

owned firms represented 3.4 percent¹ of Connecticut businesses, a very small part of the economy considering, African-Americans represent 10.4 percent of Connecticut's population.² We also see that the average unemployment rate in our state in 2010 was 9.2 percent, for African-Americans it was almost twice that at 17.2 percent.³ In 2011 the average rate declined to 8.9 percent, conversely the unemployment rate for African-Americans has inched up to 18.3 percent. As you can see the employment picture for African-Americans has worsened. Therefore the need to create more employment opportunities through small business growth should be an integral plan in building any stronger economy.

While the legislature has taken steps and implemented measures in addressing the problem of contracting nothing comprehensive has been implemented to examine the issue extensively. In the past, a number of studies have been conducted by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) attempting to determine whether disparities exist within the state contracting process. Unfortunately not all state agencies report making it difficult to arrive at any reliable conclusion. If this problem is to be resolved in due course, what is needed is a thorough examination and monitoring of the issue over a period of time. We support SB 455 because it ensures that municipalities are equally compliant in meeting set aside requirements.

We urge you to support this bill and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *State and County Quick Facts, Black Owned Firms*

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Connecticut Population By Race and Ethnicity*

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and detailed age, 2010 annual averages p — continued*, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/ptable14full2010.pdf>